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BABBLE OF THE BOULEVARD

(Special Correspondence of THE COLLECTOR)

THROUGH the instrumentality of Messieurs Gérôme, Detaille and Cain, an exhibition of a recently made collection of the works of Denis Auguste Raffet was opened a week since in the Rue Sèze Galleries. The object of the exhibit, which is, of course, a loan collection, is to obtain the nucleus of a fund which shall serve in the erection of a monument to the great draughtsman with whose work comparatively few are familiar.

Commencing life at an early age as a wood turner, Raffet spent his evenings at the School of Design, picking up the rudiments of the craft. From a long apprenticeship at the lathe and chisel-box, and having mastered the elements of drawing, he took to "decorating porcelain." Afterward, by the aid of his meagre savings, he was enabled to study art under Cabanel, Théodore Leblanc, Juhel, Rudder, Charlet and Gros. Raffet became, under this tutelage, one of the most vigorous delineators of war and of military subjects that France, or the world, for that matter, has ever produced. Confining himself almost entirely to black and white, or to the lithographic stone and pencil, he made some of the most wondrous pictures of strife and battle that were ever offered to public view. From the earliest struggles of the Revolution of '93 he followed the campaigns of the First Napoleon through Italy, Egypt and Russia to the last and fatal engagement on the plains of Waterloo. He has pictured the impassive though inexorable commander as perhaps none other save Meissonier has done before or since. His crayon was not laid aside, however, at the downfall and banishment of the immortal leader of the French forces. He worked on unceasingly for many years afterwards, painting now and again in aquarelle, but adhering, as a rule, to the more sombre medium.

What especially impresses the eye of the critic and amateur in the inimitable compositions of Raffet is the quality to which no other native or foreign artist, with the possible exception of Turner, seems to have given adequate expression. It is the immensity of the scene, the almost boundless angle of vision, the immeasurable distance, atmosphere and expanse. Like the "March of the Highland Clans" of the Royal Academician, or any of the more noteworthy landscapes that adorn the walls of the National Gallery, the drawings of the Frenchman comprise in the minuteness of detail and vigorous grouping a degree of compass and space that almost takes away one's breath. In the "Combat d'Oued-Alleg, December 31, 1839," or in the "Siège de Rome," for example, impetuosity, turmoil, disorder, death and agony are all depicted in their most vivid actuality and with a force simply amazing. The scene is vast, real. It is full of color, action and movement. The seething mass of tumultuous humanity rushes to meet the slanting bayonets of the enemy like the upheaval of some stupendous wave. The works of Raffet, as far as composition goes, may lack the daring conception of Gustave Doré. They surpass in accuracy of drawing and outline anything we have from the brush of Vernet; while bolder critics, with the courage of their convictions, have not hesitated to rank him first and foremost in the French school of military painters.

Hachette & Cie are publishing by subscription the portions of a volume which, when completed, will bear the title of "Les Capitales du Monde." Of these capitals, François Coppée has already written a delightful description of Paris, Sir Charles Dilke has done full justice to London, Carmen Sylva (Queen Elizabeth of Roumania) pictures Bucharest, Judith Gautier Tokio, while Pierre Loti has touched with grace and spirit the city of Constantinople. Not the least interesting, though, of the series is the last installment, which is devoted to New York, the metropolis, if not the capital, of the new world. The illustrations are by Myrbach, Rochegrosse, Florian, Boudier and Renouard. The text is from the pen of Count E. de Keratry. It will be remembered that this gentleman recently visited America on behalf of the French Government in the interest of international copyright. He is a keen observer, a fluent writer, and a man of rare attainments generally. For all that, however, he appears to be somewhat captious in his estimate of the American people, and particularly of the New Yorkers. Whether or not he is unjustly so, I leave the natives of that place to judge from the following extract:

New York! A business city, presenting a generally uninteresting and monotonous aspect; totally deprived of beauty or architectural style; no monuments worth speaking of to tell its history. Stiff and ungraceful; a mass of brick and mortar, dirty facades, iron and brown stone, plastered over with advertisements and posters. Whatever charm the badly paved and badly kept avenues might possess, they are dishonored by the network of telegraph wires or the endless chain of elevated road. The trains, rumbling by every two or three minutes, scatter their cinders upon the heads of the pedestrians underneath, and render life for those living along the line unbearable. The streets at night become open-air *écuries*, where grocers' wagons, trucks and butcher carts are, for want of a better place, drawn up in

front of the shops to which they belong. The city is foul and unclean, while certain quarters rival in filth and squalor the malodorous byways of Constantinople. New York is to Paris what good taste is to bad. It lacks the magnificence, the gaiety and animation of the French capital, the broad and verdant thoroughfares and the interest and distraction to be found therein. It is impossible to stroll leisurely about. There are no *flâneurs*; they would be knocked down and trodden upon in the incessant rush for the spoil. From sunrise until long after dark it is business, and business alone, that offers attraction for the perspiring Americans. Their time is passed either in the street-car, the elevated railway trains, the ferry-boats, the elevators, the telegraph office or the bar-room.

Critical as the Count de Keratry may be in his strictures upon New York life, character, and existence in general, I doubt if even the most patriotic of its inhabitants will presume to dispute his assertions. But then, like all Frenchmen who write, or have written, books upon America, he errs in comparing every city he visits to his own and incomparable Paris. If New York were as agreeable as the capital of France, her citizens would not flock in clouds to the Continent every summer. The contrary, however, is the case, and thus the writer in a measure has every argument on his own side.

It is announced that the "Memoirs of Eugène Delacroix" will shortly make their appearance. They are in the shape of a diary kept from 1845 to 1863, the date of the artist's demise. From the hands of the great painter the manuscript passed into those of Andrieu, his friend and contemporary. The latter in turn having now gone to his last account, it falls to a pupil to make public the material in question. The mass of copy left is, it is said, not altogether devoted to art, but contains many random impressions of men and events of the time or period during which it was written. It is to be learned with regret, though, that the process of Bowdlerizing is being freely practiced by the ultra-scrupulous editor of the book.

Christopher Columbus, if one is to believe the local press, is not to be forgotten in Paris on the occasion of the celebration in Spain of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America. There is now being constructed on the ground at Neuilly, once occupied by Buffalo Bill and his Indian tribes, a collection of houses and an imitation cathedral intended to represent a part of North America as it was known to "the Spaniards and also to the Dutch and English." The so-called cathedral will be a presentment of that built at Saint Augustine, Florida, in 1592, on the occasion of the first centenary of the voyage across the Atlantic made by the celebrated Genoese mariner. There will also be a large-sized model of the vessel in which the immortal navigator set sail, while the mock ecclesiastical edifice will contain many relics and souvenirs of the great discoverer. Paris will thus outdo Chicago in commemorating the important event, and those who for some time past have been contemplating a visit to the United States in 1893 may alter their decision and be content with the apologetic show provided on this side of the water.

A peasant at Anglefort, near Seyssel, Department of Ain, recently turned up, while plowing, two earthen vases filled with Roman coins. All the pieces are in a remarkable state of preservation. The greater part were struck in the time of Trajan, Gallienus, Valerian and Tetricus, while the date of their burial seems to be indicated by a silver piece bearing no traces of circulation and having on its surface the most recent date. Upon its face is imprinted a well-distinguished profile encircled by the words: "Imp. Tetricus Pivs Aug." The reverse displays the figure of a woman, standing erect, holding a laurel branch, and the words: "Loetitia Avg." This coin, often found in certain districts of France, was probably struck in the year 1020 of the Roman era (A. D. 267) at the time when Tetricus, Governor of Aquitania under Valerian and Gallien, was proclaimed Emperor by the Gallic forces.

Having licked his chops of the blood of Edmond de Goncourt, Monsieur Ernest Renan has fallen foul of Zola (Emile). How the verbal warfare began is not altogether clear. Exactly what gave rise to it is impossible to state. But the author of the "Life of Jesus" being recently asked what he thought of such characters as Coupeau, Maheu, the Fouans and other types of contemporary French fiction, replied that they were altogether too coarse for his liking. He further expressed himself to the effect that he could not understand how the most depraved of human beings, for that matter, could find pleasure in reading the adventures of such creatures. He invokes the shades of Lamartine, Chateaubriand and Gautier, who, he states, never took to inventing literary atrocities. Zola, on the other hand, regards Renan as a specialist who, confining himself to a certain sphere, sees nothing beyond it. As a philosopher and savant he ranks him next to Littré, but disputes his competency to justly criticise the modern novel. When such literary giants engage in dispute the probability is that both will come out victorious.

PARIS, May 5, 1892.

JOHN PRESTON BEECHER.

Francis P. Harper has issued for May, 1892, his catalogue, No. 54, of standard and out-of-print books, autograph letters, etc., which may be had on application.